



## FEMINIST STUDIES/ACTIVITIES IN JAPAN: PRESENT AND FUTURE

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The essay provides an overview of feminist studies in Japan nowadays, exploring in particular how new perspectives on sexuality and postcolonial theory have been gradually incorporated into feminist studies since the 1990s. In relation to sexuality, approaches to gender-sexuality have been enriched by the incorporation of new theories from areas such as literary criticism, art or history, among others. This has allowed for new critical examinations of heterosexism and of questions about gender and sexuality, and has eventually derived in the institutionalization of feminist studies with a poststructuralist influence in the Japanese academia. The article also analyzes the incorporation of postcolonial studies into feminist studies, as well as the impact that the question of prostitution during the war has had on them.

KEY WORDS: feminist studies, Japan, sexuality, gender, postcolonialism, war and prostitution, postfeminism

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### 1. Introduction

What I have been asked to do here is to provide an overview of the current panorama of feminist theory in Japan. But it is not such an easy task as I first expected, because it seems we need to reexamine several concepts that are seemingly postulated as indisputable in this sort of expression. The first one is the concept of feminist “theory”. How could we differentiate between theoretical exploration and positive research, or between epistemological understanding and empirical knowledge? How can feminist theory be defined, being separated from other feminist approaches and representations? The second one has to do with the adjective “Japanese”. An idea of Japan's unique perspective, whether being called for from abroad or claimed within Japan, tends to contribute to a concept of Japanese exceptionalism, whether intentionally or not. Rather, what is interesting to me is to trace the

way feminist studies in Japan have been co-responding to those outside of the country. The third concept to be examined pertains to temporality. The “current” situation cannot be explained simply as it is. Historical perspective is needed for any analysis of the present, which is always shaped by the past and the future.

Taking into account these matters, I will try to survey what is going on in feminist studies in Japan, specifically in epistemological terms, because it seems that what can be called epistemological shifts have recently occurred in feminist studies, and the scope of research has been extended during the past one decade and a half. For this purpose the following two topics will be mainly examined in my paper: sexuality and war/postcolonial matters.

## 2. The Dawn of Sexuality Studies

The 1990s saw a marked development in feminist studies in Japan as well as in other countries with the introduction of the perspective of sexuality into feminist studies. Certainly, before that, sexuality had been referred to or examined in Japan. But most studies tended to deal with the repression of female sexuality in terms of the man-woman relationship. Homoeroticism had rarely been investigated in the mainstream of feminist research or, if mentioned, it was usually discussed in negative terms.

For instance, Chizuko Ueno, one of the leading Japanese feminists, once argued in her book, *Pleasures of Women*<sup>1</sup> (1986), that same-sex relations, owing to, in her words, their “sameness”, cannot be counted as the kind of heterogeneous relationships which she expected could displace the homogeneity of patriarchal society, which is dominated solely by the male voice. According to her, such a subversive heterogeneous relationship could be embodied only in heterosexual couples, consisting of two sexes. Later, in the 2000s, she altered her homophobic attitude and became a sympathetic scholar of LGBTs. Before the mid-1990s, however, Japan maintained an implicit and sometimes explicit (as shown in Ueno’s case) homophobic climate even in feminist studies, and there was an unspoken taboo against discussion of homoeroticism in academic circles.

In this sense, an anthology collecting papers presented at feminist seminars at Tokyo University in 1989 can be called a precursor of sexuality studies, which came to flourish several years later in Japan. This book, entitled *What is Feminism?: Records of Our Seminars*, includes an article by Mari Osawa, “Woman-Loving Saves the Earth”, as well as several speeches presented by lesbian activists at the colloquia<sup>2</sup>. Their courageous attempts,

<sup>1</sup> As for the books and articles published in Japan and not translated into English, their titles are translated by me in the text for the convenience of non-Japanese speaking readers. Their original Japanese titles are to be found in Works Cited together with their English translations.

<sup>2</sup> Speeches made by lesbian activists include “Two Women Travelling the Sahara Desert” (「女二人サハラを行けば」) by Mieko Watanabe, “Every Woman Can Become a Lesbian If She Wishes” (「あらゆる女はレズビアンになれる、もしあなたが望むなら」) by Miwa Machino and Minako

however, were still met with satirical responses from society. *This is*, a monthly magazine published by *Yomiuri*, one of the leading Japanese newspapers, carried Osawa's paper, but altered the title into "Lesbians Save the Earth" without her permission. Furthermore, an advertizing phrase they created for her article was "Research on *Lesu* [レズ] Emerging at Tokyo University". "*Lesu*" is an extremely derogatory term for lesbians, and even the term lesbian itself was –and still often is– used depreciatively. Osawa's intention to call into question the dichotomous labeling of straight and gay by choosing the expression "woman-loving" instead of lesbianism, which was a novel idea at that time (since this was published in 1989!), was, nevertheless, ignored completely. In fact, if anything, her article was ridiculed by the very publisher that carried it in the journal<sup>3</sup>. Considering the ingrained homophobic climate hovering over both academic and publishing circles, this epoch-making anthology came out a little bit too early to be followed by other researches and publications<sup>4</sup>.

Rather, the visibility of lesbians and gays was heightened outside of academia through film festivals, pride parades<sup>5</sup>, lawsuits, coming-out narratives, etc. The year 1992 saw the establishment of the Tokyo International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, which was followed by other LGBT film festivals held in local towns throughout Japan. Parades as well as film festivals, especially in their early years, served as opportunities for lesbians and gays to meet each other and develop confidence and pride in their own lives, as well as to stage demonstrations for their civil rights and social acceptance. The lawsuit brought by OCCUR (Japan's Association for the Lesbian & Gay Movement) also played a part in forwarding increased gay visibility. In 1991 this non-profit organization group brought a suit against a Tokyo government policy that barred lesbian and gay youth from using the "Metropolitan House for Youth"<sup>6</sup> and won the case in 1994. Around this time, the terms "coming out" (カミングアウト) and "sexual orientation" (性指向) were becoming popular among coming-out writers and singers. Among others,

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Tsuruga, and "I Am a «Lesbian Feminist»" (「私は『れずびあんフェミニスト』」) by Nagisa Ohara. All three are all included in *What is Feminism?*, edited by Seigo Hirowatari *et. al.*

<sup>3</sup> Osawa protested the alteration of the title in her article, "A Re-discussion of «Woman-Loving Saves the World»", which was published in the January 1990 issue of the same journal, two months after the publication of the original one.

<sup>4</sup> *MAGO* featured sexuality as early as February 1990 in its second issue under the title, "Abnormal Sexuality".

<sup>5</sup> The first pride parade in Japan was held in Tokyo in 1994 with the name of "Tokyo Lesbian-Gay Parade" which was kept until 1999. That was followed by the "Tokyo Lesbian & Gay Parade" from 2000 to 2002 and in years 2005 and 2006 and by the "Tokyo Pride Parade" in 2007. The "Dyke March" was held in Tokyo in 1998. Other pride marches in Japan include the "Rainbow March" in Sapporo (1996-99 and 2001-the present), the "Kansai Rainbow Parade" in Osaka (2006-the present), etc.

<sup>6</sup> From the official webpage of LGBT rights in Japan. <[http://74.125.155.132/search?q=cache:m2sq6XIZQAYJ:en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT\\_rights\\_in\\_Japan+OCCUR+\(Japan+Association+for+the+Lesbian+%26+Gay+Movement\)+lawsuit&cd=1&hl=ja&ct=clnk&gl=jp](http://74.125.155.132/search?q=cache:m2sq6XIZQAYJ:en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_Japan+OCCUR+(Japan+Association+for+the+Lesbian+%26+Gay+Movement)+lawsuit&cd=1&hl=ja&ct=clnk&gl=jp)>

*Love upon the Chopping Board* (1993)<sup>7</sup> by the coming-out lesbian Marou Izumo and *Private Gay Life* (1991) by the coming-out gay man Noriaki Fushimi owed their effect to the candid and honest narration of their own lives and sexual orientation. Their autobiographical writings also provided insightful analyses of heteronormative society. What is noticeable here is an inadvertent “poststructuralist” tone underlying these narratives, in which the authors, on one hand, claim strongly their rights as lesbians or gay men and at the same time question the binary opposition of straight and gay. In such a climate, the works by Judith Butler, Eve Kosofski Sedgwick, and other queer theorists were introduced into the Japanese feminist scene.

### 3. A Way to Institutionalization

If feminist studies before the early 1990s were pursued mainly by sociologists, the new trend of feminism was opened up by literary critics, art critics, historians, cultural studies critics, etc. as well as sociologists, many of whom focused on more personal matters such as desires and intimate relations rather than the social and political system as a whole. In other words, attention came to be directed not only toward sexually discriminatory practices but also toward those psychic mechanisms and expressive languages which produce such practices as given and natural. This means that the field of feminist studies extended its scope to include not only critical examinations of heterosexism but also theoretical and epistemological approaches to the gender-sexuality order.

Indeed, during only two years –from 1996 to 1998– major academic journals in Japan, especially those with a focus on critical theory, featured articles on the topic of sexuality one after another. For instance, comparing the “Gay Liberation” issue of *Imago*<sup>8</sup> in November 1995 to its “Sexuality” issue, published only half a year later in May 1996, we find that the latter contains more theoretical and/or literary studies such as essays on lesbian films, lesbian theater, Dada’s sexuality, Madonna’s body, Schönberg’s sexuality, etc. as well as a translation of Judith Butler’s “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”<sup>9</sup>. The “Sex/Gender” issue of *Critical Space*, published at the beginning of 1996, introduced an array of American queer theorists whose works have gained increasing influence beyond their own country –such as Judith Butler, Eve K. Sedgwick, Leo Bersani, and David M. Halperin– as well as essays analyzing the Japanese situation (e.g. a study of one of the Japanese greatest poets, Shiki Masaoka, from a queer perspective). *Eureka*

<sup>7</sup> This was published in Japanese in Japan. The book with the same title published in Australia in 2001 is its sequel.

<sup>8</sup> The Japanese titles and publishers of each of the journals cited here are: *IMAGO* (「イマーゴ」) by Seidosha; *Critical Space* (「批評空間」) by Ota-shuppan; *Eureka* (「ユリイカ」) by Seidosha; *Contemporary Thought* (「現代思想」) by Seidosha; *Thought* (「思想」) by Iwanami-shoten; and *The Rising Generation* (「英語青年」) by Kenkyusha-shuppan.

<sup>9</sup> *IMAGO* already featured “Gay’s Psychology” in February 1991 and “Lesbianism” in August 1991.

also featured “Queer Reading” in the same year, paving the way for “queer studies” in Japan. This issue carried a translation of Teresa de Lauretis’s milestone “Introduction” to the “Queer Theory” issue of *differences*. The “Lesbian Gay Studies” issue of *Contemporary Thought* in 1997, journal which can be said to be an attempt to graft activism and theory, actually devoted the greater part of its Essay Section to theoretical works. And the April 1998 issue of *Thought* also featured “Gender/Sexuality” and served to extend the burgeoning sexuality studies in terms of psychoanalysis, globalization, and reproductive technology, none of which had been discussed so broadly up to this point in Japan. In addition, a literary study under the title of “Possibilities of Lesbian Studies” was serialized in 1996 in a prestigious monthly peer-related periodical on English literature, *The Rising Generation*<sup>10</sup>.

In this way research on sexuality came to be institutionalized in the mid 1990s –not only in feminist studies but also in the humanities, political science, and economics, in which feminism itself had been marginalized or ignored before. This tendency was accelerated further by the publication of translations of Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* in 1999. Before that, their works had been introduced in part<sup>11</sup> and referred to in articles included in the journals mentioned above as well as many others. But the completed translations allowed Japanese audiences easier access to the thought of these two authors, both of whom show, each in her own way, that sexuality cannot be discussed solely as a biological fact but is closely intertwined, as a social construction, with epistemology, psychology, morphology, ontology, ethnomethodology, etc. This has put forth the sexuality-conscious perspective in the mainstream of the humanities and social and political sciences in a short time. This is quite amazing, taking into consideration the previous indifference to sexuality matters and prejudice against non-heterosexuality, which had deeply entrenched in academia, including even the field of feminist studies, as mentioned before. Needless to say, the endeavors of Japanese scholars also made this shift in the academic climate possible. To cite a few: *Gay Studies* coauthored by Keith Vincent (then-resident Japanese literature critic), Takashi Kazama, and Kazuya Kawaguchi (1997); *On Love: Identity and the Politics of Desire* by Kazuko Takemura (2002: collected papers published in *Thought* in 1997-2001); Iwamani’s “Frontiers of Thought” Series, which

<sup>10</sup> This series authored by Kazuko Takemura was published six times from the June issue to the November issue in 1996. The titles of the essays are: “From Romantic Friendship to the Eve of Sexology” (「『ロマンティックな友情』からセクソロジー前夜まで」), “From Literature of Curse to Guide-Book Literature” (「呪いの文学』から『ガイドブック文学』まで」), “Feminist Commitments” (「フェミニズムとの関わり」), “Women as the Subject of Desire?: Psychoanalysis and Constructionism”, “Coming-out Narratives and Counter-Narratives by Lesbians of Color” (「カミングアウト物語と夕食入レズビアンの旅路表現」), and “Sexual Morphology” (「セックスの形態学」).

<sup>11</sup> The first chapter of *Gender Trouble* was translated by Miho Ogino, appearing in *Thought* in 1994. “Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler” by Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal, conducted in 1993, was translated by Kazuko Takemura and published in *Critical Space* in 1996.

includes *Gender/Sexuality* by Hideaki Tazaki (2000), *Feminism* by Kazuko Takemura (2000), and *Queer Studies* by Kazuya Kawaguchi (2003); and *Politics of the Intimate Sphere* by Jyunichi Saito (2003); as well as special issues of academic periodicals –such as “Gender Studies” (1999), “Gender” (2000), “Judith Butler: After *Gender Trouble*” (2000), “Feminism Never Ends” (2001), and “Judith Butler: Exciting Thought” (2006), all found in *Contemporary Thought*. In 2003, the journal *Thought* published another special issue entitled “Post-nation/Post-family: A Range of Gender Studies”, which included papers on sexuality.

As shown in the titles given to the special issues mentioned above, around this time the phrase “gender studies” gradually came to be preferred over “feminist studies” or “women’s studies”. Certainly, this nomenclature has clarified the fact that sexual issues do not pertain simply to women but to the sex-gender system itself, and has advanced the increase in population of feminist researchers in Japan –whether male or female, newcomer or established scholar. On the other hand, however, another reason for this preference is that “gender studies” sounds less political and more objective –and therefore more academic– than the terms “women’s studies” or “feminist studies”. In Japan, being political tends to be shunned as a token of academic naïveté. It is this self-proclaimed apolitical but actually political attitude prevalent in Japanese academia that made me accept a request from the editor of Iwanami’s “Frontiers of Thought” Series to write a book under the title of “Feminism” rather than “Gender Studies”.

Certainly, “Feminism”, which is etymologically derived from *femina*, may not be a perfect term for either the theoretical or the practical challenges of the economy of sexual repression. But the task of feminism is, I believe, not to naturalize but to critically foreground the concept of woman, which is often reduced to corporeality and essentialized as an irreducible given. In other words, feminism historicizes the ontology of woman by unraveling the discursive network around the term “woman”, which represses not only women but also men, and not only queers but also straights. Feminism also tries to dismantle other forms of discrimination, through questioning the analogies strategically employed between “woman” and the term which is located in the inferior part of repressive dichotomies existing in ethnicity, nationality, class, age, education, etc.

#### 4. “Post”feminist Studies and Their Effects

This sort of double-aimed feminism addressing *both* women’s liberation *and* the invalidation of the category of woman, which has become increasingly clarified since the introduction of sexuality studies, entails several (positive and negative) consequences for feminism and feminist research.

The first one is what could be called a poststructuralist *Kehre*. Feminist studies have come to incorporate poststructuralist discussions into their arguments more frequently than before. They became inclined to pay more attention to Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, French femi-

nist theorists, etc. as well as to queer theorists such as Butler, Sedgwick, Bersani, Teresa de Lauretis, and so forth. And theorists who are not necessarily labeled as poststructuralists –for instance, Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, Hannah Arendt, Louis Althusser, etc.– also came to be put on the table for feminist consideration<sup>12</sup>. This sort of poststructuralist or “theoretical” turn has served to institutionalize sexuality studies in academia, while, on the other hand, these theories sometimes have been appropriated as a cutting-edge research method by those who are not committed to feminism or LGBT issues.

This depoliticization is the second consequence produced incidentally by recent sexuality studies. A typical example is shown in the reception of “queer theory”. Basically, this appellation is highly political, appropriating the derogatory term “queer” in a performative way and transforming it into a positive concept for questioning the heteronormative system. For such critical performativity to be successfully implemented, the original offensive implication should remain cognizable to the receiver. But “queer” was translated into Japanese in phonetic symbols as “クィア” (/kuia/), which does not convey any scornful meaning but sounds, on the contrary, simply fashionable and cool. The Japanese translation deprives the appellation of the history of pain and sadness experienced by those who have been despised and denied, by being called “queer”. In addition, the overemphasis on the theoretical dimension of sexuality studies made such studies sound too puzzling and unintelligible to the people outside of academia and even to some feminist scholars who are not inclined to engage themselves in, as they call it, a “jargon-loaded mystifying language”. Consequently, the discrepancies between theory and practice and between scholarship and daily lives has come to be deplored, contrary to the intention of those queer critics, including myself, who believe that theory is based upon everyday experiences, no matter how abstract its elaborations might become.

The third effect is related to the second. With the emergence of “gender studies” or the postmodernization of feminist studies, a general air of “the end of feminism” could be observed. Against this atmosphere, an op-ed article entitled “Is Feminism Over?” (Takemura) appeared in one of the leading newspapers, *Asahi*, in 2001, which was followed in quick succession within several months by a special issue of *Grand Voyage*<sup>13</sup>, which borrowed its title from the op-ed article mentioned above, and the “Feminism Never Ends” issue of *Contemporary Thought*. Despite these feminist efforts, however, it has become more and more difficult to publish a book whose title includes the word “feminism” because, publishers say, they are no longer marketable and readers, especially the younger generation, are fed up with so-called “politically correct feminism”. As a result, for instance, a “feminist” anthology I edited in 2003 was obliged to relinquish “Feminism” as its title

<sup>12</sup> Such a tendency was equally encouraged through other perspectives that gained prominence in the 1990s and after, including postcolonialism.

<sup>13</sup> Its Japanese title is 「大航海」, published by Azusa Shobo (梓書房).

and adopt, instead, “Postfeminism”, which the publisher insisted upon –on condition that *Post* should be enclosed in quotation marks to denote the editor’s view of that prefix. In its preface I, as its editor, account for my final preference for “*Post*”feminism over *Gender Studies*, *The Third-Wave Feminism*, or just as the result of *Feminism*: (1) manifestations of recent changes within and outside of feminism (more overtly shown than by just “feminism”); (2) enunciation of feminist politics (clearer than “gender studies”); (3) its enduring and extensive activities (not a sudden movement like a “wave”); and (4), most importantly, self-reflexive attitude of feminism. “*Post*”feminism, as a product of the compromise with recent market-oriented publishing circles, can indicate, fortuitously, my belief that feminism is an ongoing, self-reflexive perspective, exposing its own biases and revealing the complex configuration of the repressive system composed by “difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, and inclusion and exclusion” (Mascia-Lees & Sharpe, 2000: 4).

The fourth consequence is an advancement of interdisciplinary and cross-site approaches in feminist studies. Originally, feminist studies were inclined to traverse the small disciplinary and departmental segmentation of modern academic structure. This transgressive tendency has been further promoted by sexuality studies, which connect different domains of topics owing to the multifaceted nature of sexuality issues, extending from body to mind, from depth psychology to social life, from the private sphere to international relations. For instance, the “*Post*”feminism anthology mentioned before takes up five topics related to problematics arising in recent years (1.Desire and Post-family; 2.Technology and Body; 3.Empire/Globalization; 4.Violence and Justice; and 5.Policies, Movements, and Theory), each of which is explored in an interdisciplinary way by several researchers in different fields. Furthermore, the chapter dealing with policies, seeks cross-site dialogues between academicians, legislators, and administrators. The round-table discussions included here were joined by a politician (then-secretary general of the Social Democratic Party) and a government official in charge of women’s issues (then-president of the National Women’s Education Center) as well as researchers and activists. Such an integrative style of feminist studies, uniting different areas of research and extra-academic activities, was more actively pursued by a large-scaled interdisciplinary program, “Frontiers of Gender Studies” (F-GENS), conducted at Ochanomizu University from 2003 to 2008 through the sponsorship of the Japanese government<sup>14</sup>. This kind of interdisciplinary approach, requiring an academic background in more than one field or speciality, appeals, almost paradoxically, to many *non*-academicians, because it sidesteps the usual disciplinary compartmentalization in exploring the reality of the complexities with which we are confronted. This is one of

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<sup>14</sup> This research program, consisting of 4 projects (focusing on Politics; Economics; Technology; and Cultural Representation & Theory) was sponsored by MEXT (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology) as one of its targeted support programs, 21<sup>st</sup> Century COE Program.



the reasons why the highly scholarly project F-GENS was successful in capturing attention on a large scale both within the academy and beyond.

## 5. Body, Psyche, and Self

At the same time, sexuality studies themselves have extended into the areas of pop culture and the entertainment world that had rarely before been examined in scholarly terms. The Takarazuka revue, an all-women musical theater, and Boys' Love (BL), a narrative comic genre by women authors which depicts male homoeroticism, captivate large female audiences in Japan. Both of them provide important means for feminists to examine transgressive sexual fantasies invented and enjoyed by "ordinary" women under *and* against their social and sexual constraints. In both cases the extravagant and stylistic representations of transgressive sexuality are created by reciprocal stimulation between performer and spectator or between author and reader. The journal *Eureka* featured "*Takarazuka*" in 2001 and "*BL Studies*" in 2007. And in 1998 the "Polysexual" issue was published, including papers on bisexuality, transvestism, and transgender.

As for transgender, in 1996 and for the first time in Japan, the Ethics Committee of Saitama Medical School submitted a report which authorized surgical treatment for patients diagnosed with gender identity disorder, and this was followed by the first sex reassignment surgery performed officially at that school in 1998. Despite still making clear distinctions between health and illness and between body and psyche, this report was an epoch-making event, contributing to a deeper understanding of the lives of transgender persons. Indeed, it was only in 1995, just one year before the report was presented, that the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology (JSPN) removed homosexuality from the category of pathology<sup>15</sup>. In 2004, as a result of campaigning efforts toward legal recognition of postoperative transgender patients, a gender recognition law was enacted by supra-partisan consensus—including five restrictive conditions, one of which was amended in 2008<sup>16</sup>.

In addition to these medical and legal milestones, there have been an increased number of transgender studies published in recent years. Among them, Aki Nomiya's "Developments in «Gender Identity Disorder» Issues and Transgender Activism in Japan" (2004)<sup>17</sup> is a good survey of the transforma-

<sup>15</sup> In 1997 the JSPN drew up its "Report and Advice on Gender Identity Disorders" (the Guidelines 1<sup>st</sup> edition), which was revised in the "Guidelines of Diagnoses and Treatments on Gender Identity Disorders, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition", issued in 2002.

<sup>16</sup> This law is entitled "the Law concerning special cases in handling gender for people with gender identity disorder". Under the law initially enacted in 2004, one who seeks gender change is required 1) not to be married; 2) not to have a child; 3) to lack any reproductive organs; 4) to be 20 years old or over; and 5) to have genitalia with similar appearance to those of the expected gender. But in 2008 the second requirement was amended from "not to have a child" to "not to have a minor child".

<sup>17</sup> The original version appeared in the *Journal of Gender Studies Japan*, 7: 75-92, published by the Japan Society for Gender Studies in 2004.

tion of circumstances surrounding transgenders during the past decade in Japan. Nomiya, as a male-to-female transgender (MTF) activist, points out the danger of discussing sexuality solely in theoretical and metaphysical terms without taking into consideration the actual everyday lives of transgenders. This essay is partly revised and included in the translation of the US-based transgender critic Patrick Califia's *Sex Changes: Transgender Politics* (Japanese trans. 2005). Masae Torai, an FTM activist, who travelled to the United States to undergo sex reassignment surgery before its legalization in Japan, has also contributed to the current discussion on transgender issues since as early as the mid-1990s by presenting in many of his books his personal experiences and, more generally, the social and legal conditions imposed upon transgenders in Japan<sup>18</sup>. On the other hand, the very definition of transgender is still in flux in Japan. Some scholars, such as Mia Nakamura<sup>19</sup>, have tried to broaden the definition of "transgender" in order to challenge a too-easy bifurcation of body and mind that is sometimes presupposed in sex reassignment treatment.

Thus, sexuality studies, since their introduction into Japan in the 1990s, have been interacting with other fields of research and with social, political, legal, and medical changes in Japanese society and developing in numerous areas so that the topic of sexuality has come to be incorporated into investigations dealing mainly with subjects other than sexuality. In 2007, the Japan Association for Queer Studies (JAQS) was inaugurated to "provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge, information and ideas for people from all backgrounds and fields of specializations who are involved in the interdisciplinary academic area of queer studies" as well as for "all involved in the various social and cultural activities surrounding queer issues"<sup>20</sup>.

There was, and still is, a myth that Japan is more tolerant of homosexuality than most western countries –a myth supported by references to the all-male *Kabuki* theater or to the tradition of *shudo*, an umbrella term for male homosexual practices carried out in the religious (Buddhist), warrior (*samurai*), and merchant classes during feudal times. This sort of exceptionalist fantasy obscures the reality of the homophobic mentality internalized through unspoken codes by people in Japan since its modernization. Therefore, theoretical and literary analyses of the economy of desire articulated through discursive practices both in social stratifications and in individual psychology go a long way toward the liberation of LGBTs and, more broadly, toward reconsideration of the formation of self constructed in modern Japan.

In this regard, it is my hope that feminist reassessment of psychoanalysis will be further pursued in Japan. Generally, psychoanalysis has not been

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<sup>18</sup> His books include *I Who Have Become a Man from a Woman* (1996), *Documents about a Certain Transsexual* (1997, coauthored by Keiko Usami), *Register Me as a Man* (2003), etc.

<sup>19</sup> Nakamura's newest book is *Queer Sexology: Undoing Sexual Preconceptions* (2008).

<sup>20</sup> Quotation from a prospectus which was drawn up, before the establishment of the society, with the aim of convincing people to engage in this association.

as popular in Japan as it has been in western countries, because psychoanalytical concepts –specifically, the Freudian Oedipal triangle– are regarded as inapplicable to the Japanese family, which is considered to be based upon maternal authority and the deemphasis of conjugal sexuality. Even among feminist scholars, only a very few have been interested in a psychoanalytical viewpoint<sup>21</sup>. But modernized and capitalized Japan has already cultivated the [hetero]sexist system<sup>22</sup>, as have other developed and industrialized societies. Therefore, critical reexaminations of psychoanalytical concepts of Woman, the Other, Language, etc. in terms of the Japanese family structure could contribute to rethinking the psychic economy of Japanese people without yielding to a concept of Japanese exceptionalism. This process might also serve to deconstruct psychoanalysis itself, which tends to be confined within a Western view of human beings, thereby universalizing the Western model of self/sexuality formation. For the Japanese, a reexamination of the individual's psyche in terms of desire may help to create a new (post-nuclear family) way of viewing human relations without any traditional patriarchal and heteronormative constraints, and *vice versa*<sup>23</sup>.

## 6. War and Post-war Discourses

In Japan, it seems that the “comfort women”<sup>24</sup> issue had a profound impact on feminist researchers, making them realize the necessity of rethinking Japanese colonialism in feminist terms. Especially, the Korean film *The Murmuring* (1995)<sup>25</sup>, which was distributed in Japan shortly after its completion, graphically revealed historical incidents which had been hidden until the early 1990s. The film is a documentary of six survivors of sexual slavery during the Asian-Pacific War<sup>26</sup> who are now living together in the House of Sharing, a communal home founded in 1992. The intolerable pain,

<sup>21</sup> For reexaminations of psychoanalysis in feminist terms, see, for instance, “On Love: The Impossibility of Eros” (「愛についてー エロスの不可能性」 1998) and “Forget-You-Not: De-Reproduction of the Sexual Regime” (「あなたを忘れないー 性の制度の脱-再生産」 1999), both of which are included in Takemura's *On Love*.

<sup>22</sup> The dual system in which sexism and heterosexism are working –not separately, but together– to establish the sexual system in modern capitalist society is called “[hetero]sexism” in my book, *On Love*.

<sup>23</sup> Japan's new ruling Democratic Party's planned proposal to repeal both the marital deduction on income tax return and the legal requirement that spouses use the same surname might become a step to a new (post-nuclear) family which is free from [hetero]sexist constraints. It seems that this social and political movement should require, in turn, further reexaminations of human relationships in terms of desire and sexuality.

<sup>24</sup> Some feminists claim that those women who were forced into prostitution should be called “sexual slaves” rather than “comfort women”, in order to emphasize the sexual violence that they suffered. I agree with this point of view, but in this article the phrase “comfort women” is used owing to its popularity in the past discussions of the topic.

<sup>25</sup> Its director, Byun Young Joo, made its two sequels, *Habitual Sadness* (1997) and *My Own Breathing* (1999).

<sup>26</sup> In order to clarify the Japanese colonial domination over neighboring countries in the first half of the twentieth century, the term, the “Asian-Pacific War” is used in this article instead of WW2.

wounding, hardship, anger, and chagrin of “comfort women”, who were forced to become prostitutes for Japanese troops had long been silenced both in Japan and Korea until 1991, when survivors found the courage, despite the misogynist code of women’s chastity, to speak publicly about the atrocities they had experienced during the war. Through pain-filled voices, inaudible murmurings, and meaningful silences, these women conveyed their deepest desire not simply to be compensated monetarily but to have their dignity as human beings restored. The forced silence after the war, no less than the forced prostitution during the war, reveals the violence brought about by the coming-together of colonialism, sexism, and nationalism. And this violence continues to the present day.

Yuko Suzuki has paid attention to this controversial problem since as early as 1991, when the first testimony was given by one of the survivors, and published the results of her research in many of her books, including *Korean Comfort Women: Testimony, A Cross Section of the Showa Era* (1991) and *Comfort Women and Marriage between Japanese and Korean: Sexual Aggression and War Responsibility in Post-war Japan* (1992). Since the mid-1980s Suzuki has also pursued historical investigations into the participation of women activists in the wartime regime from the viewpoint which can now be called postcolonial. Likewise, Chizuko Ueno pointed out, in her book *Nationalism and Gender* (1998), the continuation of war-time aggression toward women into the present time, and further extended her criticism toward the contemporary dispute between right wingers and the supporters of “comfort women” about the question of whether they were forcibly recruited by the government or went to the “comfort stations” of their own free will. Ueno believes the overemphasis on the issue of forced or voluntary participation, in which support groups and “conscientious historians” are involved, reduces this issue to positivist hunting of historical facts and, what is worse, it reinforces a demarcation between innocent victims and prostitutes and, by implication, between “good women” and “bad women”. In reaction to her provocative criticism, Yuko Suzuki, Yoshiaki Yoshimi, and other historians raised immediate objections. Some said that Ueno’s comments drastically simplified the works of her predecessors for her own argument. In the end, their debates clarified the multifacetedness of historical truth as well as the “politics of memory”, in Ueno’s terms, in which one person’s memory is authorized in the canon of history while others’ are dismissed and forgotten.

The late 1990s also saw *Zanichi* Korean feminists<sup>27</sup> start to criticize colonialism and sexism as problematic within current Japanese society. Multi-layered discriminations against foreign residents in postwar Japanese society are revealed in *Let us Sing in Unison “May People’s Reign Last Forever”* (2003), in which the author, Yeong-hae Jung, denounces

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<sup>27</sup> “*Zanichi* Korean” means permanent ethnic Korean residents of Japan, who include Korean people who were forced to migrate into Japan politically or socio-economically during the period of Japanese imperial rule, their descendants, as well as immigrants after the war, whether acquiring Japanese nationality or not.

identitarian politics based on minority/marginalized status, and analyzes the sexism, racism, and ageism internalized in repressed people as deeply as in dominant people. This title critically appropriates a popular Japanese idiom, with a slight but important change in the phrase from “your reign” to “people’s reign”. In fact, the Japanese national anthem, “May Your Reign Last Forever”, has been criticized, since the end of the Asian-Pacific War, for its association with Japanese militarism and for the deification of the emperor, especially during the war. Jung also published a coauthored book called *Myself Is a Journey: Beyond Sexism and Racism* (1999) with the Filipino Japanese Liza Go. From their shared diasporan perspective, they discuss what kind of language should be used in arguing against the two discriminations –sexism and racism. Elsewhere, Jung argues this way:

Speaking out about oneself to others is speaking to oneself so as to accept oneself, especially when one has been working to overcome many of the challenges with which one has been confronted as a mestiza, as an immigrant, or as a person from a former colonized country. But freedom lies in the vital force of those who are deprived of a sense of belongingness. (Jung, 1995: 244 [my translation])

Freedom is, she says, “an ever-lasting curve never closed to make a circle, a sandglass inexhaustible in perpetuum” (244).

Voices of those diasporas who are marginalized in the place where they are located, challenge any conventional knowledge and expression, by crossing, in their writings, the national and cultural boundaries as well as those established by literary genres between academic article, autobiography, epistle, story, poetry, etc. In fact, Jung began to write the aforementioned poetic article/ letter, “Freedom from Identity”, which was to be sent to her own daughter, when she was stimulated by *Dictee* (1982), an experimental autobiography by another diasporan artist, Korean American Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Incidentally speaking, Jung was informed of this autobiography by the Vietnamese American writer/poet/film maker Trinh T. Minh-ha when she took her class at the University of California, Berkeley<sup>28</sup>. And Trinh herself refers, in her book, *Woman, Native, Other* (1989), to another diaspora, that of the Chicana lesbian writer Gloria Anzaldúa, and her *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), which embodies Anzaldúa’s mestizanness in her narration of interwoven literary genres and languages. Indeed, *Borderlands/La Frontera* is written in more than two languages, English and Spanish, including several chicana dialects spoken in the southwest of the United States. The voices of these women’s diasporas, all traversing and breaking down the national, cultural, linguistic

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<sup>28</sup> Jung talked about this episode at the symposium held at Ritsumeikan University, entitled “A Presentation of *Dictee* and a Symposium: Korean Diaspora and Art”.

and literary genre walls in each of their own ways, respond to each other and link together in a rhizome-like horizontal expansion through their writings.

Lee Chong-Hwa, a Japan-based Korean scholar, can be counted among these thinkers/writers who create their own writing styles in order to grasp something missed, erased, plundered by nation states and dominant cultures. She resists the political and cultural amnesia of wars in her own strong but poetic language in *The Politics of Murmuring* (1998). Below is my English translation of a passage from her book, with its original version written in Japanese which is the language she has acquired.

Unspeakable memories, memories that cannot be unhistoricized or resist being historicized. Fragments of memories. Memories connecting to the current lives of the survivors. Their lives, which are not reduced merely to testimonies or to a history, but the lives that are still going on, holding fragments of memories never to be historicized. Important and indelible memories for these lives.

語れない記憶、歴史化することのできない、そうさせない記憶。破片のような記憶。いま続いている本人たちが生きることにつながる記憶。つまり、証言に、歴史になっていく過程ではない、歴史化できない記憶の破片を抱えていま現に続いている生。その生には大事な破片。<sup>29</sup>

## 7. The Imperial Family and the Construction of the Nation-Family

Since the 1990s feminist solidarity has been created internationally to impeach wartime sexual violence and support restoration of justice and dignity for victimized women. A people's tribunal, Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery, was constituted by women's and human-rights non-governmental organizations<sup>30</sup>, and convened in Tokyo in 2000. 64 victims and 390 of their supporters from various countries in Asia (South Korea, North Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, East Timor, and Malaysia) and the Netherlands participated in the court and gave testimony in person or through video. The court members were composed of Gabrielle McDonald from the US as presiding judge, three judges from Argentina, the UK, and Kenya, chief prosecutors Patricia Viseur-Sellers from the US and Ustinia Dolgopol from Australia, and forty-eight prosecutors from nine other countries<sup>31</sup>. The next

<sup>29</sup> *The Politics of Murmuring* is intentionally unpagged. Therefore, I include here only the title of the chapter which includes this excerpt.

<sup>30</sup> The organizations included Violence against Women in War and Conflict Situations Network, Japan (VAWW-Net Japan), from Tokyo; the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan from Seoul, Korea; and the Asian Centre for Women's Human Rights from Quezon City, Philippines.

<sup>31</sup> Judge McDonald is a former President of the Yugoslavia War Crimes Tribunal. The other four judges were: Carmen Maria Argibay, President of the International Women's Association of

year the tribunal's final verdict was issued in The Hague, finding ten Japanese military authorities, including Emperor Hirohito, guilty of military sexual slavery and rampant sexual violence and brutality. News reporters from the mass media both in Japan and overseas were interested in the tribunal<sup>32</sup>, but there was a difference in coverage between Japanese media and others. The fact that Emperor Hirohito was found guilty of these war crimes did not make the headlines of any leading Japanese newspapers. Japanese media tended to focus solely on the tragedies and testimonies of women victims rather than on the responsibility for such atrocities<sup>33</sup>. This silence of the Japanese news media was also criticized in foreign newspapers such as *The Hankyoreh* (South Korea), *The Guardian* (UK), and *Die Tageszeitung* (Germany)<sup>34</sup>.

Challenging this tacit taboo, feminists have already begun to analyze the emperor system and, specifically, its relationship with the construction of the modern Japanese family. Kazue Muta investigates, through her collected historical documents, the Japanese version of a nation-family system with the emperor as national paterfamilias in her book, *Family as a Strategy: Formation of Modern Japan as a Nation State, and Women* (1996). Her 2006 book, *Beyond Engendered Family: Modern-Current Politics of Life/Sexuality, and Feminism*, explores further the relationship between emperors and Japanese heterosexist society, including the current controversy over imperial succession.

The debate about the possibility of a ruling empress became heated when a princess was born to Crown Prince and Crown Princess in 2001, because, among her generation, there was no male member in the imperial family who was considered a legitimate successor to the throne by the Imperial Household Law, which was enacted after WW2, but still maintains the principle of agnatic succession. This controversy appears to have died down since the birth of a baby boy to the Crown Prince's brother and his wife in 2006. But still there are problems over agnation vs. primogeniture and over a dearth of male heirs in the imperial family, so that the succession

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Judges (Argentina); Christine Chinkin, expert on gender and international law and professor at the University of London (UK); and Willy Mutunga, president of the Commission on Human Rights (Kenya). As for chief prosecutors, Viseur-Sellers was then the Legal Adviser for Gender-Related Crimes in the Office of the Prosecutor for the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and the Rwanda Tribunal; and Dolgopol taught law at Flinders University, Australia. Among the 48 prosecutors, 12 were from South and North Korea, 8 from China, 7 from Taiwan, 7 from the Philippines, 4 from Indonesia, 2 from East Timor, 2 from the Netherlands, and 6 from Japan.

<sup>32</sup> 95 media representatives from abroad and 48 from throughout Japan attended the tribunal in Tokyo in 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, English language newspapers in Japan such as *Japan Times*, *Asahi Evening News*, and *Daily Yomiuri* reported the conviction of the Emperor for his crime. Furthermore, there was a controversy about whether or not NHK, Japan's sole public broadcaster, gave in to the pressure of right wing politicians and edited their original coverage of this trial.

<sup>34</sup> The information about this people's trial mentioned above is based on materials posted on the official website of Violence Against Women in War-Network Japan, <<http://www1.jca.apc.org/vaww-net-japan/english/index.html>>.

issue has not yet been resolved completely. For feminists, this issue is more problematic, since in terms of gender equality the principle of agnatic succession should be abandoned in order for female members of the family to accede to the throne. In fact, some people hope that a future ruling empress will embody a symbol of the gender equality that will have been achieved in Japan, by overcoming the patrilineal and patriarchal system of the imperial family. On the other hand, however, it is the emperor system itself that is closely intertwined with the construction of family values in modern Japanese society in each of its stages. Indeed, the glorification of the imperial family deceived the public into a patriarchal nationalism during the Asian-Pacific War.

The art historian Midori Wakakuwa in *The Portrait of Empress Haruko* (2001) highlights the first empress in modern Japan, Haruko, who was glorified as an ideal model of Japanese women to be elevated in modern society, but whose activities were, nevertheless, strictly restricted within the domestic sphere as a faithful wife to the emperor/husband and mother of the nation/family. A large number of Haruko's portraits produced and circulated during her husband's reign attest to the visual strategies employed by the government to appropriate women for the construction of a new modern nation-state under the cult of "true womanhood". Another of Wakakuwa's books, *Images of Women Created by the War* (2000), investigates the mobilization of women during the war through her visual analyses of cover designs and illustrations of women's magazines published during the war, including *Friend of Housewives*, which enjoyed a huge circulation of 1.600.000 even in wartime.

## 8. Postcolonial Studies

These feminist reconsiderations of modern Japan were encouraged both by domestic and international climates created around 1990.

Domestically, the death of Emperor Hirohito in 1989 triggered off the removal of a taboo on discussing his responsibility for the Asian-Pacific War (though still only to some extent, as is obvious in the above-mentioned voluntary restraint displayed by mass media in their reports on the 2001 tribunal), and contributed to facilitating research on Japanese imperialism. Okinawan studies have also advanced postcolonial scholarship in Japan. Okinawa –located in the southernmost part of Japan and suffering from a multi-layered history of colonization/occupation in the past one century and a half<sup>35</sup>– has produced, in recent decades, an increasing number of local writers and artists who present historical memories of (post)colonial Okinawa

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<sup>35</sup> The annexation of the Ryukyu Kingdom by Japan in 1879; the Battle of Okinawa fought at the very end of the Pacific War, involving an immense number of civilian losses including forced mass suicides; the occupation by the U.S. from the end of the war until 1972; and the continuation of a U.S. military presence after the reversion of Okinawa.



with the aid of their powerful imagination and ingenuity<sup>36</sup>. But so far, attention has generally been directed toward male writers, both by readers and literary critics, while, on the other hand, there are interesting studies on representations of masculinity in US-occupied Okinawa. One might hope, therefore, that women writers like Tami Sakiyama might be further introduced and investigated without following a pattern of simplified victimization of women in Okinawa. Their writings could be rethought fruitfully in comparison to those of women writers in other hybrid cultures, as well as to works by postcolonial thinkers who transgress literary genres, such as those mentioned above.

As for interactions with overseas scholarship, postcolonial studies and subaltern studies, which emerged around 1990 in Britain, India, and the United States, had an impact on Japanese feminists. Among others, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are most influential through translations of their writings and screenings of Trinh's films. Trinh herself made two films based on research conducted in Japan during her visiting professorship in 1998<sup>37</sup>, which include *The Fourth Dimension* (2001) and *Night Passage* (2005). The latter was made in homage to *Milky Way Railroad*, a classic novel by Japanese writer Miyazawa Kenji.

Spivak's well-known article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and her recent book *Critique of Postcolonial Reason* are frequently referred to not only in postcolonial studies but also in other humanities studies, *including feminist studies*. As shown in the modifier added at the end of the previous sentence, her work tends to be discussed outside of feminist circles in Japan—mainly by male scholars—despite her own continuing interest paid in feminist issues, no matter how far her argument appears to have moved into other topics. In this respect, her conversations with feminist researchers during her stay in Tokyo in 2007 was fruitful not only for Japanese feminists, but for other scholars interested in her work<sup>38</sup>.

As for the concept of "postcolonialism", its Japanese translation sometimes brings about an effect as unfavorable as that pertaining to "queer". The term was translated solely in phonetic symbols as "ポストコロニアリズム" (/postokolonializumu/), in spite of a Japanese equivalent we already have for the term "colonialism" ("植民地主義"), which clearly carries the meaning of colonialism. As a result, the newly-translated term cannot convey adequately the political reality of colonial violence and sometimes renders postcolonial studies simply academically "cool", especially when

<sup>36</sup> For instance, Eiki Matayoshi's *Buta no mukui* (「豚の報い」 1996) and *Fortunes by the Sea* (「果報は海から」 1998) trans. by David Fahy; Shun Medoruma's "Droplets" (「水滴」 1997) trans. by Michael Molasky; Tami Sakiyama's *Suijyo-okan* (「水上往還」 1988); Ritsuhiro Oshiro's *Cocktail Party* (「カクテル・パーティー」 1967); Mineo Higashi's *Okinawa no shonen* (「オキナワの少年」 1972).

<sup>37</sup> Trinh's seminars and lecture were held at Ochanomizu University in May-July, 1998, organized by the Institute for Gender Studies, Ochanomizu University.

<sup>38</sup> Spivak's colloquium at Ochanomizu University was printed in English in *F-GENS Journal*, n° 10, and its Japanese translation is accessible in Spivak, "A Conversation with Gayatri Spivak at Ochanomizu University".

used in its shorten form, “ポスコロ” (/posukolo/). This tendency seems to be related, to some extent, to the above-mentioned non-feminist acceptance of Spivak’s work found in Japanese academic circles.

Increased exchange programs between Japanese researchers and those in neighboring countries have also been encouraging and encouraged by postcolonial studies. Generally speaking, Japanese scholars –whether feminist or not– had shown interest only in Euro-American scholarship until recently. But a newly-gained postcolonial perspective has activated academic dialogue and institutional exchange between Japan and other Asian countries –specifically between Japan and South Korea. For instance, international conferences and research projects such as “Feminist Analyses of Modernity in East Asia” (in Seoul, 1999), “Modern Girl, Asian and Beyond” (in Tokyo, 2004), “History, Nation, Women” (in Seoul, 2006), “Re-interpretation of Women’s Histories in Japan and Korea” (in Tokyo, 2007), etc. contribute to a rethinking of the concept of modernism and its social and cultural realization in Asian countries from a broader perspective than the western definition of modernism.

It is hoped that further cooperation will take place among educators, researchers and institutions in East Asia, as well as those along the Pacific Rim and throughout the world. The goal of this collaboration would be the construction of feminist networks for reexamination of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and globalization without falling into oversimplified universalization or extreme cultural relativism. This sort of collaboration would contribute, internationally, to building alternatives to the current market-oriented globalization and, domestically, to strengthening feminist solidarity to fight the backlash that feminists in each of the countries, to a greater or lesser extent, are experiencing in recent years. In this sense, I hope transnational dialogue among feminist researchers will be encouraged more than in the past.

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